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ABSTRACT

Inservice teacher education offered by Southeastern Louisiana University teaches rural special educators self-monitoring techniques for their students. A critical shortage of special educators has led to the hiring of minimally trained teachers, who need more training particularly in the areas of discipline and behavior management. A review of the literature revealed that self-monitoring procedures increase on-task behavior for many students with mild disabilities. For problems extending beyond the limits of on-task behavior, self-evaluation procedures teach students to evaluate their own classroom behavior using the same rating scale as the teacher. These procedures were field tested with students enrolled in a self-contained resource class in a rural elementary school. The self-monitoring procedure was found to result in an increase in the amount of time students spent on-task, and the self-evaluation intervention was even more effective. After the field test, training materials were developed to provide teachers with strategies to teach students to self-monitor or self-evaluate during seatwork in the special education classroom. The training packet included an audiotape and teacher's manual which could be used independently. Student training involves defining the target behavior(s), providing a rationale, modeling the procedure, and providing practice. Teachers were encouraged to collect and graph data regarding student behavior. (KS)

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Rural Special Education Teacher Training: Promoting Self-Control in Students with Mild/Moderate Disabilities

Louisiana, along with other southern states, is experiencing a critical shortage of qualified special educators, particularly in rural areas. Some factors contributing to this shortage in Louisiana include low teacher salaries, the reduction of the availability of tuition exemption for teachers taking college level courses for certification, and higher tuition costs. In an effort to increase the number of certified special education teachers, the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education reduced the number of courses that teachers holding certification in elementary or secondary education must take to be certified in special education. Thus, courses selected for the revised certification reflect the current need to move "certified" personnel into the classroom as quickly as possible regardless of the quality of the preservice training program. The courses selected for the program of study reflect minimal competencies and do not address the "state of the art" in special education today.

Given the regional economic circumstances and the critical shortage of qualified special education teachers, there appears to be little possibility that additional requirements will be included for certification to ensure quality training that does more than address minimal competencies. In a desperate attempt to increase the teacher pool, quality training has been sacrificed for expediency.

The faculty of the special education department at Southeastern Louisiana University (SLU) have attempted to provide the best teacher training possible given the circumstances described. SLU's service area includes a large number of rural parish residents. Of the 14 parishes (counties) served by the university, seven are designated as rural. Within this seven parish area recruitment and retention of qualified special educators has been difficult due to low teacher salaries and unique community characteristics which have created demanding teaching situations. The lack of special educators documented in the most recent Louisiana Comprehensive System of Personnel Development report and the complex community characteristics have resulted in rural areas which have a critical need for qualified special educators.

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To ascertain training needs of rural special educators in Louisiana, personnel from a federally funded rural training project in the Department of Special Education at SLU surveyed 117 special educators around the state (Reiff & Anderson, 1989). A needs assessment instrument was used to delineate the most important competencies in training programs for rural special educators. Two of the top five competencies focused on "generic/noncategorical approaches to teaching rural exceptional children" and "working with a wide diversity of handicapping conditions." Often special educators in rural areas are required to work with diverse groups of students without support. Students with low incidence handicaps may be served in these classes, and it is not unusual for some teachers in rural parishes to work with groups of students with a six-year age span. Therefore, a need for generic techniques that teachers can use with diverse groups of students with disabilities has been demonstrated.

In response to these needs, the faculty at SLU are available to local parishes to provide inservice training, and present at the annual state conference for special educators. In recent years the significant increase of teacher and principal attendance at workshops offered in the discipline/behavior strand, has demonstrated this particular need. In addition, it is not unusual for teachers to contact department faculty members to request help with difficult student behaviors in their special education classes.

Thus, within the department, means were sought to expand teachers' knowledge base with regard to behavior management procedures and alternatives. It was observed that teachers rely primarily on teacher-directed (external) behavior control. However, several researchers and theorists have cautioned special educators about the tendency to rely solely on behavior modification techniques for students with disabilities (e.g., Rooney & Hallahan, 1985). It has been noted that students, who have been trained to rely on externally imposed controls in special education classes, often experience behavioral difficulties when mainstreamed to regular classes. Thus, there is a need to help students move away from reliance on external behavior controls. However, many teachers have not been trained in the use of techniques which may help students learn to self-regulate their behavior. These techniques may include self-instruction, self-evaluation, self-recording, and self-reinforcement.

After a complete survey of the literature, an effort was made to develop a set of self-management procedures demonstrated to be effective for students with a variety of learning and/or behavior problems. In addition, it was determined that procedures selected must be cost-effective in terms of time and expense, and easily taught to interested teachers, given barriers related to scheduling and distances (campus to school). Two sets of procedures, a self-monitoring procedure (combining self-recording and self-evaluation

techniques) based on the work of Hallahan and colleagues and a self-evaluation procedure based on the work of Rhode, Smith and colleagues were selected for further investigation.

The self-monitoring of attention studies conducted by Hallahan and colleagues at the University of Virginia are of particular interest because these researchers have validated a procedure which has been demonstrated to result in increased on-task behavior and some improvement in academic productivity for children with learning disabilities (e.g., Hallahan & Sapona, 1983; Kneedler & Hallahan, 1981). These techniques have been demonstrated to be effective with high school students with mild disabilities (Blick & Test, 1987), average ability children with learning disabilities (Hallahan, Lloyd, Kosiewicz, Kauffman, & Graves, 1979; Harris, 1986), and low IQ children with learning disabilities (Rooney, Polloway, & Hallahan, 1985).

Conclusions resulting from this work include: Self-monitoring of attention leads to increased on-task behavior and some increase in academic productivity, cues are needed to prompt students, self-recording is a necessary component, and back-up reinforcers are not necessary. This procedure is recommended for use with seatwork when students are in the early stages of practicing skills, rather than for new learning tasks (Hallahan & Sapona, 1983).

These procedures have been demonstrated to increase on-task behavior for many students with mild disabilities. However, often teachers are seeking techniques which will provide more comprehensive assistance for problems extending beyond the limits of on-task behavior. Thus, another self-management procedure, self-evaluation, was explored as a possible alternative for these teachers.

Rhode, Morgan, and Young (1983) reported on the use of a self-evaluation procedure with elementary school students with behavior disorders. These researchers found that they could teach students to evaluate their own classroom behavior using the same rating scale as the teacher in resource classes, and that eventually this procedure could be successfully transferred to other settings. While Hallahan and colleagues targeted on-task behavior, these researchers focused on a set of inappropriate school behaviors which included "high rates of disruptive classroom behavior most of the time, refusal to work and complete assigned tasks, frequent inappropriate talking in class, frequent out-of-seat occurrences, noncompliance with teacher requests, aggression toward peers, bizarre talk, and daydreaming" (Rhode et al., 1983, p. 173).

The self-evaluation procedure involves a clearly delineated set of classroom rules, a cue to self-evaluate behavior, a student/teacher matching system, and an exchange of points for back-up reinforcers. Rhode et al. reported that student behavior improved with the self-evaluation training and transferred to other

settings. The effectiveness of this procedure has also been demonstrated with children and youth with behavior disorders in rural settings (Smith, Nelson, & Young, 1988).

Field Test Results

These procedures were field tested with students enrolled in a self-contained/resource class in an elementary school in a rural parish (Carr & Sawyer, 1991). The students (n=24, Gds. 3-5) were classified as learning disabled (LD) according to the guidelines of the State of Louisiana (Bulletin 1508, 1986). All students in the class exhibited off-task behavior, particularly during independent seat work activities. The teacher reported that these behaviors interfered with academic performance and presented on-going management problems in the classroom.

The Placheck Recording System (Tawney & Gast, 1984) was used to collect data on occurrence/nonoccurrence of on-task behavior during baseline. On-task behavior was defined as the student at his/her seat working quietly with eyes focused on the page or pencil in hand, the student enroute to a materials station, the student listening to teacher instructions, or the student asking a question of the teacher or aide. Immediately following baseline all students were taught to self-monitor using techniques described by Hallahan et al., (1979). The self-monitoring procedure was found to result in an increase in the amount of time students spent on-task. Baseline was then re-established and a second intervention was implemented.

The second intervention involved training the same students in the use of a self-evaluation procedure based on the work of Rhode et al. (1983) and Smith et al. (1988). For this intervention, students were trained to compare and rate their behavior on the basis of compliance with class rules. This self-evaluation intervention was demonstrated to be more effective with the students. This particular group of students appeared to respond more favorably to the feedback and praise involved in the matching system and seemed motivated by the use of back-up reinforcers. Teachers and students indicated a preference for the self-evaluation intervention.

In the field test students appeared to benefit from additional training, including more clearly defined and illustrated class rules and the student/teacher matching system. Thus, the effectiveness of the self-evaluation procedure, as developed by Rhode, Smith and colleagues, provides evidence to suggest that some students may benefit from additional training, over a substantially longer practice period, with back-up reinforcers, praise, and feedback.

Teacher Training

Training materials were then developed to provide teachers with strategies to teach students to self-monitor or self-evaluate while completing seatwork in the special education classroom. The training materials included an audiotape and a teacher's manual to accompany the tape. The audiotape included instructions which described how to collect baseline data, explained behavior modification and cognitive behavior modification, provided a rationale for the effectiveness of self-management techniques with children with learning and/or behavior problems, and described the actual training procedures. A decision was made to use a tape to ensure consistency in implementation of interventions, and to provide accessibility for teachers residing in rural areas. These teachers often had difficulty reaching the university on a regular basis. Thus, the training packet could be used independently and was readily available to interested teachers.

Student Training Procedures

Training steps used to teach students a self-management procedure typically include the following: define and give examples of the target behavior(s), provide a rationale to the student for using the procedure, demonstrate and model the procedure, and provide practice. Teachers involved in this project were instructed in self-management training procedures as established by Hallahan et al. (1979) and Smith et al. (1988).

Teachers were instructed to follow training procedures for either of the two interventions (self-monitoring of attention or self-evaluation) with two modifications. First, each of the interventions requires a brief initial training session prior to implementation of the intervention. Occasional review of the self-management procedures is recommended following breaks in school routine. Teachers in the project were encouraged to involve students in more extensive training using practice with prompts, corrective feedback, and praise over several days prior to implementation of the procedure. It also seemed essential that students receive explicit definitions and examples of the target behavior(s).

Second, teachers were encouraged to use graphs to display student behavior. Graphs can be used as a means of communicating intervention effects and providing feedback to the student and teacher. For the self-monitoring intervention, it was recommended that teachers report percentage of intervals on-task during a class period using bar graphs or line graphs for the data display. For the self-evaluation intervention, it was recommended that teachers report the number of points students earned during a class period, again using bar or line graphs for the data display of student behavior. Teachers were also encouraged to collect and graph data regarding student productivity during class periods in which the

intervention was in effect.

Conclusion

Training in a broad array of behavior management techniques is essential for rural special educators. It seems particularly important that these special educators be trained in alternatives to traditional behavior modification methods. However, many of these special educators are unaware of research and practice guided by developments in the field of cognitive behavior modification. Rural teachers in this project were trained in the use of two self-management procedures, a self-monitoring intervention and a self-evaluation intervention, which have been demonstrated to be effective with students with a variety of learning and/or behavior problems.

These procedures can be used to teach students to become effective modifiers of their own behavior and thus gain self-control. In implementing these procedures teachers generally became aware of several advantages in the transfer of responsibility for behavior management from the teacher to the student and thus were more likely to actually use these procedures in the classroom.

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